DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 044 737 CG 006 030

AUTHOR Clements, William H.
TITLE Research on Who Should Go To College, and When.
INSTITUTION Wisconsin State Univ., Stevens Point.
PUB DATE 6 Nov 70
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Wisconsin Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, November 5-6, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
DESCRIPTORS *College Bound Students, College Choice, *College Preparation, *College Students, Counseling, Counseling Effectiveness, Counselor Functions, Counselors, Guidance, *Guidance Objectives, Guidance Personnel, Guidance Programs, Guidance Services, Pupil Personnel Services, *Secondary School Counselors, Student Personnel Workers

ABSTRACT

Extensive research is cited which has established that students most likely to succeed in college: (1) enter college between ages 21 and 25; (2) have been out of high school between 2 and 5 years; (3) have parents of moderate means but do not have to work full time; (4) may be married; (5) are native born or in special programs; (6) have well educated mothers; (7) are interested in learning for the sake of learning or understand what they want to get out of college; and (8) have learned how to work and have some idea of what kind of work they want to do. These predictors are elaborated upon and their implications discussed. Counselors are admonished to heed such data in their dealings with the high school populations whom they serve. (TL)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED 044737

Research On Who Should Go To College, and When

by William H. Clements
November, 1970

As I look into a sea of faces representing guidance counselors of perhaps thousands of young people, I cannot help a feeling of awe at the collective potential power that you hold. If indeed the young actually listen to, and are profoundly influenced by, their counselors, what a tremendous impact you can have on their lives! It may give you a feeling of satisfaction to know that you can wield much influence. You should be concerned, however, that you consistently give good advice. The last thing a counselor should be is a pied piper, leading the young to possible disaster.

Before going further, let me recognize that there are at least two mutually exclusive views of the basic role of the counselor. One extreme is the counselor who took my graduate course in philosophical foundations of education. When asked to state briefly his own philosophy of education, the young man replied, "I have none. As a counselor, my role is to help young people do what they want to do or go where they want to go." This young man reminds me of the farmer who said to a neighbor, "Will you watch my horse while I go into the store?" When he returned, the horse was gone. "I thought you agreed to watch my horse," said the farmer crossly. The neighbor replied, "I did - till he got out of sight."

If we wait for the young to decide where they want to go and what they want to do before we help them at all, their fate is uncertain and likely to be disastrous. Of course, equally bad is the handing out of advice that is basically unsound. Avoiding both of these errors is a major concern of those who guide the young.

The facts and thoughts I want to give you today are probably vastly different from much that you have been hearing. You may never want to hear them again, but at least I can say that you may never have heard them before.

Who should go to college? The time was when the public thought that every

CG 006 030

high school graduate should fare forth at the age 18, starry-eyed, to the college of his choice and live happily ever after. Then we were told that if you pass a certain test, college success is yours. Recent research has played havoc with such sacred cows.

Last year Irving Cohen, Director of Institutional Research at Manhattan Community College, New York, wrote a paper entitled, "The Obsolescence and Replacement of College Admissions Criteria."[1] Mr. Cohen examined some non-academic predictors of college success. Let me enumerate some of his findings:

1. Entering college freshmen who had been out of high school 2 to 5 years did far better than others.
2. The best average quality work was done by freshmen who entered college between the ages of 21 and 25.
3. The quality of scholarship in college was found to correlate positively with parental income up to and including the $9,000 to $10,000 bracket. Beyond this point, the affluence of parents was related negatively to scholarship.
4. Amount of education of parents related positively to college scholarship, with the exception that students whose parents had only an 8th grade education did better than students whose parents' education had ended after they graduated from high school. (The amount of education of the mother is more significant than the amount of education of the father.)
5. Married students did far better than unmarried students. (Also they averaged much older.)
6. Regular students who had siblings in school did not do as well as those who did not, but students in special programs who had siblings in school did far better than those who did not.
7. Foreign-born students did not do as well as native-born, except for students in

---

[1] A paper delivered at the Association for Institutional Research Annual Forum, New Orleans, May 14, 1970.

special programs, who did substantially better than the entire group.

8. There was a positive correlation between the number of languages spoken and the GPR.

9. Students who had to work did not do as well as those who did not. Also students near the poverty level were more likely to withdraw.

10. As usual, high school rank and the predictive test scores, related to college achievement, but left much of the variance in performance unexplained.

It is an interesting fact that nothing Mr. Cohen found out was new, but to my knowledge he is the first man who "got it all together." And when he got it all together, I could not help but sit up and take notice. Several of his findings I had already discovered for myself. I knew of others who tentatively arrived at some of Cohen's findings. These and other findings by Cohen I intend to re-examine again and again in future research, and I urge others to do likewise. For if these things are true, they present a much different picture than we have been looking at concerning who should go to college and when.

Academic predictors of college success continue to account for 25 to 35 per cent of the variance in college performance, so they are important and should not be discarded. But what about the other two-thirds or so of the variance? The Cohen research reveals some relevant facts about <u>when</u> people should go to college. We need to know more, particularly about the kind and extent of motivation for college work. Following are some of the generalizations that now appear to be facts:

1. There are many thousands of young people in college who should not be there at this time. There are many explanations: fugitives from the draft, enchantment with the prestige and advantages of a college degree but not with the rigors and discipline of college education; a hazy or downright false picture of employment facts; subjection to pressures of parents and perhaps some teachers that the only thing to do is go to college because "you have the ability;" com-

plete uncertainty about what they want to do in the near future, not to mention what career they should aim for.

2. It is now perfectly clear that college is not for everyone; it cannot do all things for all men and women. That innocent expression: "Try it; a little college can't hurt anyone," is not so innocent and not so true. A little college <u>can</u> hurt people if it starts them down the wrong street or damages their personalities because of frustrations or failures. Some young people who get into college turn to harmful activities; dope, excessive drinking, shoplifting, destruction of property, or suicide. So far, my examination of extreme activists shows that most of them are <u>not</u> good students; that they have no career in mind while they are in college; that they are easily duped and do not face the realities of life. Such people come out of college far worse than they went in.

3. Young people coming out of high school too often do not face realities concerning job opportunities as related to their own strengths and weaknesses. There are several explanations, not all of which point to a fault of the student.

   a. The first is that when students find that college is not for them, they are taught to rationalize around the roadblocks instead of facing them honestly. They are taught to think that if only they had pass-fail grading, or no final exams, the tensions of life would be removed, and they would "learn for the sake of learning." But what is the behavior of people who learn for the sake of learning? It is the same as it was when I went to college. The student plunges into the learning situation eagerly, not waiting to follow the instructor's time table. He studies especially those things that have meaning and interest to him. He is always ready for a test because he is way out in front of the class and does not have to cram for the last 48 hours before a test. He also learns that someone else besides himself has a good understanding of what he should be learning. In summary,

the student who wants to remove all the challenges so he can pursue pleasure as usual is not ready for college. And this is not to excuse the imposition of arbitrary or unreasonable standards in evaluation of the learning process.

b. A second explanation is that too many of our young people have somewhere learned a kind of contempt for anything but white collar work. They call themselves intellectuals, and those who work with their hands or with tools are called "clods" and "farmers". On the other hand, those who have to work their way through college are gaining valuable informal education through their work experience. Also they are less likely to pick up expensive, often harmful habits when they have to pay the bills themselves.

It is a significant fact that the Department of Labor reports that most new job openings will, in the future, be those requiring a technical, rather than a liberal, education. We have reached the saturation point and beyond the saturation point, in the number of teachers and most other professional personnel. Of course there is always room at the top for particularly good people in any professional field. I am talking about run-of-the-mill or marginal college students. In summary, our young people who are not highly motivated or who have not the abilities, interests or intellectual stamina and discipline for careers for which college is necessary should consider other kinds of careers where there is greater demand. They should learn early not to shy away from hard work, or from getting their hands dirty. And they should take for their motto, when they look for employment, this quaint old saying, "Humbly think, when you go to woo, not who you'll have, but who'll have you."

I have in my possession a document entitled Wisconsin Manpower Projections 1968 to 1975, prepared under the auspices of the Wisconsin State Employment Service. I encourage educators, and particularly guidance counsellors, to

examine the tables of this publication, which projects Wisconsin employment changes in various fields to 1975. While this document is sound, it is very easy to draw two wrong assumptions from it. (1) The emphasis of the report on the increase in white collar jobs in Wisconsin is not in line with the national picture given by the U. S. Department of Labor, which says blue collar jobs represent the major part of the increase. (2) The fact is that right here in Wisconsin the market is greatly overcrowded with white collar workers, including teachers, and the number of people now going into teacher preparation will stagnate the market even more. Meanwhile, it is almost impossible to get someone to build your house, fix your TV set, or fix your plumbing; and these jobs are paying wages far higher than teachers earn. Most of the jobs available in the future will require a technical education or a working apprenticeship.

c. A third explanation of the failure of young people to face employment realities, is that in many cases we don't know what these realities are. In this age of technical and social changes, the nature of employment opportunities and job descriptions changes so fast that it is difficult to know, even at the time one enters college, what kinds of work will be most in demand at the time one receives his or her college degree. I can illustrate this rapid shift in vocations right in my own family. A few years ago my present job didn't even exist, and it is the only job precisely of its kind anywhere. How could you prepare in advance for such work? My oldest son is a lawyer, and he is employed by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. I had never heard of the Association, or of a job such as he has until he took the position. My youngest son is in his second year with VISTA, an employment reality where the demands of the experience are still far beyond our preparation capabilities. Occupational patterns are changing so rapidly that they cannot be projected to any group of young people very far in advance.

d. A fourth reason for the failure of young people to face up to employment realities is that many employers haven't. They too often require college degrees instead of a specialized preparation. Educators as well as employers often have the cart before the horse. They provide broad offerings in high school so that students specialize in high school when they should be getting a liberal education. Then students are expected to get a liberal education in work beyond high school when they should be specializing, either in or out of school.

We hear a great deal of complaint these days from college students about college courses not being relevant. OK, they are not relevant. Relevant for what? If the students themselves know "relevant for what," they would know where they want to go and take relevant courses. Most of the complaints about relevance come from students who have no clear goals in college. They are the people who should not be in college at this particular time.[2]

Let me draw some generalizations from the findings of these new kinds of research and from the logical deductions which follow:

1. No student should go to college unless he has acceptable reasons for being there. Learning for the sake of learning is always an acceptable reason for being in college. Preparation for a vocation, if college is the proper preparation is another.
2. All young people ought to have significant work experience early in life. Some of this can be obtained through part time work while in college. For a great many, it means going to work instead of to college at age 18. Some young people, both men and women, can serve in the armed forces, in government-sponsored work, or as apprentices in industry. Those who need technical training for their

---

[2]See: Walter W. Abel, "Attrition and the Student Who is Certain," Personnel and Guidance Journal 44: 1042-45 Je '66. This study supports the hypothesis that in a small liberal arts college, a student who has definite goals but low first year achievement will not graduate. He is doing his best. The corollary is that students who do not have well defined goals are not doing their best.

work should attend a technical institute. However, being a full time student as well as a full time worker is not satisfactory. One reason that older students do better in college than younger ones is that they have established some definite goals; and they have learned how to use their time more efficiently. This is especially true of married students, whose goals and priorities are definitely established.

3. Students who start to college just out of high school, and who do not do well in college, should drop or be dropped from college for at least a year and go to work. A few years ago Dr. Warren Jenkins, then Dean of Letters and Science here at WSU-Stevens Point collected data on L&S and Applied Arts and Science graduates who had been given academic drops while in school. Many of these people petitioned to return immediately to school, and those whose chances looked best were re-admitted. Dr. Jenkins asked me to analyze these data, and I found that by far the best college work was done, on the average, by those who stayed out of college for some time without returning. Mark you, these were the same people whose chances were considered poorest. The moral is: those who are dropped from college should stay out for a while and work before returning.

4. Since work experience is profitable mixed with education, people who seek advanced degrees should have considerable work experience. Nowhere is this more evident than in higher education. In the past, most people who pursued doctoral work had ample work experience of one kind or another, especially those who were teachers. But now many young people go all the way to the doctorate without any work experience. Many young Ph. D's enter higher education to teach without much experience in living, with little or no teaching experience, and with little other work experience. They have spent all their lives in the ivory tower. Is it any wonder that the general public considers the thoughts and behaviors of these people a little queer? And how about the influence they

have on our youth? I want nothing to do with communism, but I must say that the communists have something when they insist that young people get a taste of hard dirty work. Those who do work are not likely to complain about the rigors of academic life.

5. The time to enter college is when you know why you are there and the real purpose of the college education. This may come for some people at age 18, just out of high school. For a good many others it will come 2 to 5 years later - possibly 15 years later for some. It has often been assumed that when one gets away from studying for a year or more, it is hard to get back into the "academic groove" again. I know from personal experience as well as from the wealth of research-some of which was just cited - that the advantages of maturity far outweigh the disadvantages. I am not suggesting that by not rushing into college just out of high school that we will reduce the number of college students. We may, or we may not. The important point is to have people in higher education at the time when they will profit from it the most. This will not only save money, but tend to eliminate campus unrest and dignify higher education. This in turn will encourage much better taxpayer support for higher education.

If you think I am alone in this view, hear the words of a college President, S. I. Hayakawa, as condensed in the November, 1970, Reader's Digest on the subject of "The Real Root of Campus Disorder?"[3]

> "In seeking the causes of student unrest, I believe that we have not paid enough attention to the degree to which many young men and women are involuntary and restless captives of the educational system. From about the age of 15 on, our young people, whether or not they have a bent for intellectual life, are pushed and prodded by their parents and teachers - and even more by community expectation - to go to college."

---

[3] S. I. Hayakawa, "The Real Root of Student Disorder?" Condensed from The Wall Street Journal. Reader's Digest, November, 1970, pp. 167-168.

This writer then goes on to point out the difference in purpose and attitude of those who want to go to college and those who do not belong there. "Listen to these young people; they have something to tell us," he says. "They are saying clearly and unmistakably, '<u>We want out</u>!'"

To this our reply should be not to encourage them to start, if they are not ready. John Keats, in his book, <u>The Sheepskin Psychosis</u> probing causes of college dropouts, quotes a dean of admissions saying, "The boy of eighteen who is not ready to go to college <u>can</u> spend two years that he will later view as respectably spent, and positively spent, and start college at twenty."[4]

6. The sixth point is that the education of women is much more important than many people realize. When we find consistently that the child's success in school is more closely linked to the education of the mother than of the father, we are giving another reason that more women should have a college education. It has other values than obtaining an MRS degree. Don't get me involved in the Women's Liberation Movement. These gals are going to fail for the same reason campaigners are going to fail who start out campaigning for the election this morning. The election was already held on November 3. The liberation of women has already occurred, but they don't realize it. There are now more new job openings for women than for men, as has recently been pointed out by any number of labor statisticians. Most of these positions require a technical education or else on-the-job training.

7. Another point is that <u>drive</u> is a very important asset in learning. The tendency for better scholarship to go with higher income of the parent holds true only to the middle income bracket. The Cohen studies, using data of about two years ago, found the $9,000 to $10,000 income bracket to be the most favorable. What happens to students whose parents are in the higher income brackets? With many

---

[4] John Keats, <u>The Sheepskin Psychosis</u>. Dell publication. No. 7805, 1965, p. 152.

exceptions, it may be possible to generalize that there is a tendency for needy students to be more hungry for learning, and therefore more successful in learning, than are more affluent students. The research shows also that married students have a strong tendency to make good in college. It is perfectly clear that married students do not attend college just for kicks. On the other hand, college students who come from extreme poverty do, as a group, have the most difficulty in college. So far I find no evidence that awarding these students full scholarships goes very far to insure their success as students.

8. A final point is that to the best of my knowledge, the best college student material is the well integrated, wholesome individual who understands himself or herself as an individual, who has an excellent attitude toward learning, understands and has learned to live with personal limitations; who has integrity enough not to rush in and conform with the latest fad dreamed up by his peers, and who has learned to listen keenly, though not necessarily accept, the admonitions of his teachers. I have come to these conclusions not only from the research, but from many years of dispatching high school graduates to college in my role as a high school administrator, as well as many years in the receiving line of higher education. While such good college students come from all kinds of high schools, I am convinced that it is often easier to produce such well rounded individuals in small high schools than in large ones. That is what explains (to me) the more probable success in college of graduates of small high schools, even though graduates of large high schools tend to have somewhat higher ACT and other test scores.

If I am allowed one wish for you as guidance counselors, it is that you will do your best to make your pre-college students wholesome, responsible individuals; that you will counsel them to go to college when and if they have real purposes in mind, and that you will be aware of the many new roles in society and the society of the

future, and that you will make your students aware of these roles, all of which are honorable if properly assumed.

One other point should be made about student activists, stemming from my own research findings that our activists are not, as a group, good scholars. There seems to be an obsession among educators to get young people to become committed at an early age to curing society's ills. Unfortunately, at this age young people do not know enough on all sides of the issues about society's ills to cure them. Give us college students who will heed their instructors' urgings, neither accepting or rejecting them until they have heard more points of view, instead of rushing to act on first impulse.

Let me summarize briefly what research has shown about who will succeed in college, in addition to the usefulness of academic predictors. Most likely to succeed is one who enters between the ages of 21 to 25, has been out of high school 2 to 5 years, has parents who are of moderate means but does not have to work full time, may be married, is native born or else in a special program, and has a well educated mother.

The successful student can be identified while in college by interest in learning for the sake of learning or a clear understanding of what he wants to get out of college, who is committed to learning rather than primarily to "causes," who has learned how to work and has an idea of what kind of work he or she wants to do, has a wholesome outlook on life, and a fairly broad high school background. The student who is dropped for academic failure should remain out of school until he decides what to accomplish in college, if anything. College is not a place for fugitives from the draft or those who enter because of parental or community pressures.

Finally, high school counsellors need to make young people aware of the changing pattern of job opportunities and the importance of working where society needs help, whether he has a white collar job or a blue collar job.

I thank you.